

# THE NAKED MAN—Newly-Weds, a Strange Visitor, Surprises By Richard Harding Davis

IN their home town of Keepsburg the keeps were the reigning dynasty, socially and in every way. Old man Keep was president of the trolley line, the telephone company and the Keap National Bank. But Fred, his son, and the heir apparent, did not inherit the business. Fred had gone through Harvard, but as to that, unless he told people, they would not have known it. Ten minutes after Fred met a man he generally told him.

When Fred arranged an alliance with Winnie Platt, who also was of the innermost inner set of Keepsburg, everybody said Keepsburg would soon lose them. And everybody was right. When single each had slogged for other social worlds to conquer, and when they married their fortunes and ambitions they found Keepsburg impossible and they left it to lay siege to New York.

THEY were too crafty to at once attack New York itself. A widow they met while on their honeymoon at Palm Beach had told them not to attempt that. And as she was the Palm Beach correspondent of a society paper they naturally accepted her advice. She warned them that in New York the waiting list is already interminable and that if you hoped to break into New York society the clever thing to do was to lay siege to it by way of the suburbs and the country clubs. If you went direct to New York knowing no one, you would at once expose that fact and the result would be disastrous.

She told them of a couple like themselves, young and rich, from the west, who, at the first dance to which they were invited, asked, "Who is the old lady in the wig?" and that question argued them so unknown that it set them back two years.

It was a terrible story and it filled the keeps with misgivings. They agreed with the lady correspondent that it was far better to advance leisurely, first firmly to intrench themselves in the suburbs, and then to enter New York, not as the keeps from Keepsburg, which meant nothing, but as the Fred Keeps of Long Island, or Westchester, or Borden-town.

"In all of those places," explained the widow, "our smartest people have the country homes, and at the country club you may get to know them. Then, when winter comes, you follow them on to the city."

THE point from which the keeps elected to launch their attack was Scarborough-on-the-Hudson. They selected Scarborough because both of them could play golf, and they planned that their first skirmish should be fought and won upon the golf links of the Sleepy Hollow Country Club. But the attack did not succeed. Something went wrong. They began to fear that the lady correspondent had given them the wrong dope. For, although three months had passed and they had played golf together until they were as loath to clasp a golf club as a red-hot poker, they knew no one and no one knew them. That is, they did not know the Van Wardenes, and if they lived at Scarborough they were not recognized by the Van Wardenes you were not to be found on any map.

Since the days of Hendrik Hudson the country-seat of the Van Wardenes had looked down upon the river that bears his name, and ever since those days the Van Wardenes had looked down on everybody else. The Van Warden estate had the appearance of a well-kept cemetery. And those Van Wardenes who occupied the country place were as cold and unsovable as the stones of a cemetery. They were not recognized by the Van Wardenes, and according to the newspapers, was a devil of a fellow and in no sense cold or unsovable. So far as the keeps read of him, he was always being arrested for speeding, or breaking his collar-bone out hunting, or losing his front teeth at a dinner at Warden Koop's. Koop's was a newspaper, was a devil of a fellow and in no sense cold or unsovable. So far as the keeps read of him, he was always being arrested for speeding, or breaking his collar-bone out hunting, or losing his front teeth at a dinner at Warden Koop's.

Harry, according to all local tradition, he frequently motored out to Warden Koop's, the Van Warden country seat—and according to the newspapers, was a devil of a fellow and in no sense cold or unsovable. So far as the keeps read of him, he was always being arrested for speeding, or breaking his collar-bone out hunting, or losing his front teeth at a dinner at Warden Koop's.

"If you would only play polo or ride to hounds instead of playing golf," sighed Winnie Keep to her husband, "you would meet Harry Van Warden, and he'd introduce you to his sisters, and then we could break in anywhere."

"You would ride to hounds," returned her husband, "and the only thing I'd break would be my neck."

THE country place of the keeps was completely satisfactory, and for the purposes of their social ambitions the estate setting was perfect. The house was one they had rented from a man of charming taste and inflated fortune; and with it they had taken over his well-disciplined butler, his pictures, furniture, family silver and linen. It stood upon an eminence, was heavily wooded and surrounded by many gardens; but its chief attraction was an artificial lake well stocked with trout that lay directly below the terrace of the house and also in full view from the road to Albany.

This latter fact caused Winnie Keep much concern. In the neighborhood were many laborers, and on several nights the fish had tempted these born poachers to trespass; and more than once, on hot summer evenings, small boys from Tarrytown and Ossining had broken through the hedge and used the lake as a swimming pool.

"It makes me nervous," complained Winnie. "I don't like the idea of people prowling around so near the house. And think of one mile away in Sigs Sings. Most of them are burglars, and if they ever get out our house is the very first one they'll break into."

"I haven't caught anybody in this neighborhood breaking into our house yet," said Fred, "and I'd be glad to see even a burglar."

They were sitting on the brick terrace that overlooked the lake. It

the dusk of a wonderful October night had fallen on the hedges, the clumps of evergreens, the rows of close-clipped box. A full moon was just showing itself above the trees, turning the lake into moving silver.

Fred rose from his wicker chair and, crossing to his young bride, touched her hair fearfully with the tips of his fingers.

"What if we don't know anybody, Win?" he said, "and nobody knows us? It's been a perfectly good honeymoon, hasn't it? If you just look at it that way it works out all right. We came here really for our honeymoon, to be together, to be alone."

Winnie laughed shortly. "They certainly have left us alone," she sighed.

"But where else could we have been happier?" demanded the young husband loyally. "Where will you find any prettier place than this, just as it is at this minute, so still and sweet and silent? There's nothing the matter with that moon, is there? Nothing the matter with the lake? Where's there a better place for a honeymoon? It's a bower—a bower of peace, solitude, a bower of—"

AS though mocking his words, there burst upon the sleeping countryside the shriek of a giant siren. It was raucous, virulent, insulting. It came as sharply as a scream of terror. It continued in a bellow of rage. Then, as suddenly as it had cried aloud, it sank to silence; only after a pause of an instant, as though giving a signal, to shriek again in two sharp blasts. And then again it broke into the hideous, long-drawn scream of rage, insistent, breathless, commanding, filling the soul of him who heard it, even of the innocent, with alarm.

"In the name of heaven," gasped Keep, "what's that?"

Down the terrace the butler was hastening toward them. When he stopped he spoke as though he were announcing dinner. "A convict, sir," he said, "has escaped from Sing Sing. I thought you might not understand the whistle. I thought perhaps you would wish Mrs. Keep to come indoors."

"Why?" asked Winnie Keep.

"The house is near the road, madam," said the butler. "And there are so many trees and bushes. Last summer two of them hid there, and the keepers—there was a fight."

The man glanced at Keep. Fred touched his wife on the arm.

"It's time to dress for dinner, Win," he said.

"And what are you going to do?" demanded Winnie.

"I'm going to finish this cigar first. It doesn't take me long to change." He turned to the butler. "And I'll have a cocktail, too. I'll have it out here."

The servant left them, but in the French window that opened from the terrace to the library Mrs. Keep lingered irresolutely. "Fred," she begged, "you—you're not going to poke around in the bushes, are you?—just because you think I'm frightened?"

Her husband laughed at her. "I certainly am not," he said. "And you're not frightened, either. Go in. I'll be with you in a minute."

But the girl hesitated. Still shattering the silence of the night, the siren shrieked relentlessly; it seemed to be at their very door, to beat and buffet the window panes. The bride shivered and held her fingers to her ears.

"Why don't they stop it?" she whispered. "Why don't they give him a chance?"

WHEN she had gone Fred pulled one of the wicker chairs to the edge of the terrace and, leaning forward with his chin in his hands, sat staring down at the lake. The moon had cleared the tops of the trees, had blotted the lawns with black, rigid squares, had disguised the hedges with wavering shadows. Somewhere near at hand a criminal—a murderer, burglar, thug—was at large, and the voice of the prison he had tricked still bellowed in rage, in amazement, the convict turned it hunted him, reaching for him, pointing him out, stirring in the heart of each who heard it the lust of the hunter, which never is so cruel as when the hunted thing is a man.

"Find him," he's there, behind your hedge! He's kneeling by the stone wall. That's he running in the moonlight. That's he crawling through the dense hedge. Stop him! Drag him down! He's mine! Mine!"

But from within the prison, from within the gray walls that made the home of the siren, each of 1,200 men cursed it with all his soul. Each, clinging to the bars of his cell, each, trembling with a fearful joy, each, his thumbs up, urging on with all the strength of his will the hunted, rat-like figure that mumbled panting through the crisis of the night, he shadowed by strange lights, beset by shadows, staggering and falling, running like a mad dog in circles, knowing that wherever his feet led him the siren still held him by the heels.

AS a rule, when Winnie Keep was dressing for dinner, Fred, in the room adjoining, could hear her unconsciously and light-heartedly singing to herself. It was a habit of hers that she had. But on this night, although her song was directly above where he sat upon the terrace, he heard no singing.

He had been on the terrace for a quarter of an hour. Gridley, the aged butler who was rented with the house, and who for twenty years had been an inmate of it, had brought the cocktail and taken away the empty glass. And Keep had been alone with his thoughts. They were entirely of the convict. If the man suddenly confronted him and begged his aid, what would he do? He knew quite well what he would do. He considered even the means by which he would assist the fugitive to a successful getaway.

The chief of the question did not

concern Fred. He did not weigh his duty to the state of New York or to society. One day when he had "inherited the institution," as a somewhat sensitive neighborhood prefers to speak of it, he was told that the chance of a prisoner's escaping from Sing Sing and not being at once retaken was one out of six thousand. So with Fred it was largely a sporting proposition. Any man who could beat a six-thousand-to-one shot commanded his admiration.

Having settled his own course of action, he tried to imagine himself in the place of the man who at that very moment was endeavoring to escape. Were he that man, he would first, he decided, rid himself of his telltale clothing. But that would leave him naked, and in Westchester county a naked man would be quite as conspicuous as one in the purple-gray cloth of the prison. How could he obtain clothes? He might hold up

WITH a start, Keep raised his eyes, and, distressed by his look, the young man continued less confidently.

"I don't blame you if you don't believe it," he stammered, "seeing me like this; but I do live right near here. Everybody around here knows me, and I guess you've read about me

now was of deeper rage and came in greater volume. Between his clenched teeth the naked one cursed fiercely, and then, as though to avoid further questions, burst into a fit of coughing. Trembling and shaking, he drew the canvas cloak closer to him. But at no time did his anxious, prying eyes leave the eyes of Keep.

"You—you couldn't lend me a suit of clothes, could you?" he stammered. "Just for tonight? I'll send them back. It's all right," he added, reassuredly. "I live near here."

INDIGNANTLY Fred shut the door, and, walking to the veranda, halted the chauffeur. James, the chauffeur, was a Keepsburg boy, and when Keep had gone to Cambridge James had accompanied him. Keep knew the boy could be trusted.

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"Exactly," said Fred.

The wheels of the touring car crunched on the gravel drive and Fred slammed the door, and, like a sentry on guard, paced before it. After a period which seemed to stretch over many minutes there came from the inside a cautious knocking. With equal caution Fred opened the door the width of a finger and put his ear to the crack.

"You couldn't find me a button book could you?" whispered the stranger.

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